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Trouble keeps ex-CIA agent popular

Special group
has its share
of dark secrets

by JEFF BARON
Journal staff writer

In an unpretentious third-floor office in McLean is the headquarters of a group that gives a voice to people who have taken an oath not to speak.

The Association of Former Intelligence Officers has had a lot to say lately.

On the Iran arms scandal: "It should have been (the province of the CIA) and if it had been it would have been run differently."

On the Soviets' use of sex in the spy business: "There's nothing wrong with that. Every police agency does it. That isn't anything new."

On the State Department's failure to listen to security concerns at the U.S. embassy in Moscow and the Soviet embassy in Washington: "I think there's a lot of jealousy within the government."

On congressional investigations of intelligence operations: "You've got some real demagogues up there who have a real opposition to everything."

On the Association of Former Intelligence Officers: "We have an opinion on everything. 'Frequently wrong but never in doubt' is our motto."

The words are those of John K. Greaney, executive director of the association and a Central Intelligence Agency officer for close to 30 years. Greaney retired as the CIA's associate general counsel, but for 15 years he worked on the covert operations side in the Far East.

Now Greaney is debating Abbie Hoffman on television, popping up on the evening news, and referring calls from reporters to other prominent members of the group. The CIA

and other intelligence organizations are experts at saying nothing, so Greaney's group has as its mission educating the public on how the intelligence community works and why it should be supported.

"People love to beat up on the intelligence community, and the intelligence community really doesn't have any constituency," Greaney said.

The group, whose office is on Whittier Avenue, was founded by former CIA officer and writer David Steele Phillips in 1975, when the agency hit bottom in the eyes of the public after congressional hearings on its shadier operations.

Today the association has 20 chapters and 3,500 members, about a third of them in the Washington area. About 60 percent are former military intelligence officers; the rest are former intelligence workers from the CIA, FBI, National Security Agency and State Department.

Greaney said the group is "small potatoes" compared to such large and well-financed operations as the Armed Forces Communications Electronics Association and the Association of Old Crows, a group of electronic intelligence officers.

For one thing, Greaney's group is only for retired officers, so it doesn't have a glossy magazine filled with expensive advertisements that defense contractors use to reach procurement officers.

For another, he said, people who spend their careers doing covert op-

erations are not joiners. "They're used to doing things alone," he said. Greaney himself didn't join the group until he was offered the job to run it.

The serious business of the association involves, among other things, working with publishers and college professors to make authoritative works on intelligence available and to encourage people to teach about the field.

Meetings give members the chance to hear from speakers like William Webster, director of the FBI, and the State Department's director of foreign missions. Meetings also let the members talk shop.

"They like to tell war stories. That inflates their egos, to try to outdo each other. Some of the egos are incredible," Greaney said.

Even in talking with other ex-officers, members are careful not to give too many sensitive details about the work they once did, Greaney said. And members know not to trust everything they hear, either.



John K. Greaney
Speaks for those who cannot